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Critical Notes

ON THE OPENING LINES OF THE LEGEND OF SARGON

Although the Legend of Sargon has been translated and discussed many times since its discovery by Rawlinson in 1867, the writer believes that hitherto scholars have failed to grasp the significance of the opening lines of this interesting piece of Babylonian literature. Line 3, *aḥ abi-ia i-ra-mi ša-da-a*, is usually rendered "the brother of my father dwells in the mountain." But there certainly is no obvious reason for mentioning the fact that the uncle of Sargon resided in the mountain. Or are we to look upon this line as furnishing an interesting detail, but one without any bearing upon the action of the story? This is possible. But is it probable? It is the object of this note to suggest a translation of *aḥ abi-ia irami šadā* which may show the relevance of this line to the rest of the legend.

The line should probably be translated "the brother of my father *is dead*." This translation is offered in view of the following facts:

As is now generally recognized by Assyriologists, the idiom KUR-*šu emêdu*, literally, "to stand on one's [his] mountain," is a euphemism for "to die." A discussion of this idiom by the writer may be found in the *Expository Times*, XXIII (1912), 282 f. The correct reading, *šadāšu emêdu* instead of *mātašu emêdu* was established by a passage in the Boghaz Keui documents (Winckler, *MDOG*, No. 35, 43). To the cases cited in the *Expository Times*, *loc. cit.*, are to be added *i-te-mid šadā-šu* (King, *Babylonian Boundary Stones*, 33, l. 41), and *i-mid šad-da-šu* (*IR*, 43, 11).

A parallel idiom is found in some Sumerian hymns. For example, in a Tammuz hymn, *CT*, XV, Pl. 18, Obv. 25-26, we find the passage [*mu-lu*]-*zu alim-e kur-aš ba-u*, "thy lord, the powerful one, to 'the mountain' has he gone." Langdon (*Sumerian and Babylonian Psalms*, 319) translates ". . . unto the nether world has taken his way." So also Zimmern ("Tamüzlieder," *Berichte der Phil. Hist. Klasse der K. Saechs. Akad. d. Wiss.*, LIX, 230), who calls attention to a passage in *IVR*, 11, 41-42a: *umun-bi idim-ma-ra kur-šu ba-a*, which is translated into Semitic by *be-el-šu iš-gu-un-ma ša-da-a ir-kab*. Cf. also *loc. cit.*, 43-44, *kur-šu ba-an-da-a*, rendered by *ša-da-a ir-ta-kab*. The phrase *šadā irkab* (*irtakab*) is, of course, to be translated "the mountain he ascended," which is only another way of saying "he died." Zimmern recognized this when he said: "An unserer Stelle ist unter dem 'Berge' wohl der Weltberg mit dem darunter befindlichem Totenreiche zu verstehen." *kur-šu ba-u* is translated by *ana šadī irtakab* in *BA*, V, 620, K. 2004, Rev. 22 f.

In view of the idioms *šadāšu emēdu* and *šadā rakābu* (= *kuršu u* or *a*), "he stood on his mountain" and "he ascended the mountain," it may not be too venturesome to suggest that *ramū šadā*, "to dwell on the mountain," is another euphemism for "to be dead."

It is evidently the purpose of the opening lines of the legend to show that fortune did not smile upon the infant Sargon. That the early days of inaugurators of new eras (Moses, Cyrus, Romulus) are fraught with peril, has always been a favorite fiction. Sargon's mother was poor. His father died soon after his marriage. The widow could not turn to his brother, for he was dead. So Sargon was brought forth in secret and exposed.

If the translation of l. 3 of the legend, offered above, is correct, then it is probable that levirate marriage was practiced among the early Babylonians. The Code of Hammurabi does not mention this institution, but the Code dates from a period more than half a millennium after Sargon of Akkad. Besides, levirate marriage is a religious institution (Westermarck, *The History of Human Marriage*, 510 f.), and would, therefore, even if still practiced in Hammurabi's day, hardly have been the subject of legislation. Or are we to think of polyandry? As has been pointed out before (Jastrow, *The Civilization of Babylonia and Assyria*, p. 130), Urukagina attempted to abolish this institution. See Thureau-Dangin, *Sumerische und Akkadische Königsinschriften*, 54, Col. 3, 20 f. For another interpretation of this passage see King, *A History of Sumer and Akkad*, p. 184. If we knew the date of the composition of the legend we might speak with a little more assurance on these points.

Even if it should turn out that the word *enitum*, ll. 2 and 5, usually translated "poor," is a variant of *entum*, "votary" (Jeremias: *Vestalin*), the interpretation offered would not be affected, for, in spite of assertions to the contrary, it cannot be proved that the *entum* and other "sacred" women could not marry and have children. In fact a text published by Poebel, *BE*, VI, pt. 2, No. 8, seems to offer clear proof that they did marry and that they had children. However, this point does not call for further discussion here.

D. D. LUCKENBILL

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE INTERROGATIVE PARTICLE ׀ IN HEBREW

The Hebrew and Aramaic interrogative particle ׀ is considered by some to be a contraction of a particle *hal* identical with Arabic هل.¹ Others identify it with the Arabic interrogative هـ'ā, the difference being due to a phonetic change from ' to h or vice versa, like the cockney interchange

¹ So Gesenius-Kautzsch, *Hebräische Grammatik*²⁸, p. 306i.